



**MULTICULTURAL FOSTER CARE  
RECRUITMENT PROJECT**  
Evaluation report

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This project had many components, and required us to work through many parties to provide an overview of the activities and outcomes delivered. While we have presented information and conclusions to the best of our ability, we are aware that the report represents our perspective, and that there may be information that we did not understand or overlooked. We would like to acknowledge the commitment and passion with which those involved in the project sought to communicate messages about the need for foster carers.

Eleonora De Michele and Bronwen Elliott  
Consultants

## Introduction

The Multicultural Foster Care Recruitment Project was funded by NSW Community Services of the Department of Family and Community Services as a response to the need for foster carers for children from non-English speaking cultural backgrounds. It has recently been estimated that 25% of children in care in NSW are from a non-English speaking background, while 15% are from a birth family where a language other than English is spoken at home<sup>1</sup>. The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 provides the legislative framework for provision of foster care for children in NSW, and s.9(d) states that where it is necessary for a child to be cared for temporarily or permanently away from their family, the child's name, identity, language, cultural and religious ties should, as far as possible, be preserved. The legislation reflects both research and practice wisdom regarding the importance of such ties both for the development of a positive identity, and also to enable children to maintain meaningful relationships with their family. Placement with a family from the same cultural, linguistic and religious background as the child is the most effective way to ensure continuity of culture, language and religious observance are maintained. A major review of foster carer availability highlighted both challenges experienced recruiting foster carers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and the ongoing need for such carers.<sup>2</sup> The same review also highlighted the then Department of Community Services' achievements in recruiting Muslim carers from Arabic and Turkish communities through partnership with Muslim community workers and use of community media outlets.

In response to the ongoing need for foster carers from non-English speaking cultural backgrounds, and recognising the importance of active community involvement in recruiting carers from these backgrounds, the Multicultural Foster Care Recruitment Project sought to mobilise the connections and credibility of locally based community organisations with the expertise of Community Services foster care staff. The aim was to recruit foster carers from the Greek community, African communities, and Arabic speaking communities.

Funded organisations were expected to:

- Hold a minimum of six community information sessions
- Develop local, ethno-specific community education products
- Provide practical assistance for people through the foster care application process
- Support Community Services foster carer recruitment teams in assessment and training of foster carers
- Collect and report on evaluation data

Funding was provided to two non-government organisations that had extensive experience in the provision of services to refugees, humanitarian entrants and other migrants. Settlement Services International (SSI) is a partnership of seven migrant

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation Brief, Multicultural Foster Carer Recruitment

<sup>2</sup> Social Policy Research Centre, (2004) The Availability of Foster Carers

resources centres. SSI was funded to work with the Greek speaking community in Central Sydney and the Inner West, and with Arabic speaking communities in South Western Sydney. SSI recruited Trina Soulos from the multicultural communications and research consultancy Cultural Perspectives to manage the project. Ms Soulos had previous experience working for a non-government out of home care agency so understood the foster care context and had experience in service delivery in a culturally diverse environment. Information sessions were delivered by staff from partner agencies Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), Muslim Women's Association, Arab Council of Australia and Liverpool MRC, in partnership with staff from the Family and Community Services Multicultural Foster Care Program at Bankstown, and by staff from St George MRC, Metro MRC, and the Greek Orthodox Community in partnership with the Community Services Metro Central Foster Care Recruitment Team.

Sydwest Multicultural Services Inc is a non-profit community association in Western Sydney and was funded in partnership with Anglicare Migrant Services to work with African communities in Western Sydney. Abulla Agwa from Sydwest and Monica Biel from Anglicare were responsible for the African project. They delivered sessions in partnership with the Community Services Metro West Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team.

## Methodology

The initial methodology proposed the recruitment of participants for telephone interviews and focus groups at the information sessions, as well as interviews with staff responsible for delivering components of the program, and relevant Community Services staff. Because the evaluation team was recruited after the commencement of the project Sydwest/Anglicare had completed all the required community information sessions before the evaluation commenced, and SSI had already completed briefing the staff who would be conducting the various information sessions.

Abulla Agwa from SydWest recruited some participants who had attended information sessions to attend a focus group and to participate in telephone interviews. Staff from the Metro West Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team also recruited some participants for telephone interviews from African applicants who were being assessed by the team.

Trina Soulos from SSI asked providers of information sessions to recruit participants for information sessions, but reported difficulties because this requirement was communicated late in the preparation process. Details were provided only of participants from Liverpool MRC. It was not possible to recruit participants for a focus group from the Greek or Arabic communities' sessions. It was not possible to recruit participants through the Multicultural Foster Care Program or the Metro Central Foster Care Recruitment Team because no applicants proceeded to assessment by these teams during the course of the evaluation.

Telephone interviews were conducted with seven people who attended African information sessions using a standardised interview schedule. One person required the Telephone Interpreter Service. Seven people attended a focus group conducted at SydWest on 4 May. Two people who attended the focus group also participated in interviews. Two people who had agreed to be contacted for telephone interviews could not be contacted in spite of repeated attempts.

Of the seven people from the Arabic information sessions who consented to be contacted for interviews, four were able to be contacted, and three could not in spite of repeated efforts. Three interviewees were contacted with the help of the Telephone Interpreter Service. One participant was unable to recall attending the information session, and one advised that they did not want to participate in the interview.

The following people participated in face to face interviews in relation to the project:

Esta Pashalidis-Chilas, Metro Migrant Resource Centre

Dina Abouesh, Arab Council of NSW

Hala Al Duleimi, Arab Council of NSW

Abulla Agwa, Sydwest

Monica Biel, Anglicare

Cheryl Webster, Anglicare  
Trina Soulos, Settlement Services International/Cultural Perspectives  
Lily Anthony, Metro Central Foster Care Recruitment Team, Family and Community Services  
Les Cormack, Metro West Foster Care Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team, Family and Community Services  
Isobel Illa, Metro West Foster Care Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team, Family and Community Services  
Nahia Agha, Multicultural Foster Care Program, Family and Community Services  
Quang Mai, Multicultural Foster Care Program, Family and Community Services  
Alev Gisven, Multicultural Foster Care Program, Family and Community Services  
Hacer Nazim, Multicultural Foster Care Program, Family and Community Services  
Thanh Nguyen, Multicultural Services Unit, Family and Community Services  
Echo Morgan, Multicultural Services Unit, Family and Community Services  
Fatma Mohamed, Multicultural Services Unit, Family and Community Services  
Cindy Isaac, Carerlink

Telephone interviews were conducted with:

Pietty Greenwood, Liverpool MRC  
Antoinette Chow St George MRC  
Wafa Zaim Muslim Women's Association  
Efrosini Costa Greek Orthodox Community

The evaluators also attended a presentation facilitated by SSI on 29 July 2011 and attended by representatives of the partner agencies in all three projects, and an Information session delivered by Abulla Agwa from Syd West to prospective African applicants on 13 April 2011.

# African Project

## Project Rationale

The African Project built on work already undertaken by SydWest and Anglicare responding to community concerns about issues for African families raising children in Australia such as intergenerational conflict, issues leading to Community Services involvement and removal of children, and the placement of these children with non-African families. Family difficulties arising from traumatic exposure to war and conflict prior to leaving Africa contribute significantly to circumstances where African children are placed in foster care. It is estimated that about 5% of children coming into care in Western Sydney are from African families.<sup>3</sup> Various projects had been undertaken by SydWest to assist African families to maintain an African identity while effectively parenting children within the Australian context. An African Learning Circle Project provided an opportunity to build trust between Community Services staff and African community workers, and Monica Biel from Anglicare had already had unofficial involvement with fostering, and had discussed the need for foster carers with African women in many settings, approaching individuals and groups. The project proposal involved a commitment to support fostering applicants through the process of application and training through a partnership with the Metro West Foster Care Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team. The team did not have any African staff, and so was reliant on the partnership with SydWest and Anglicare to access cultural knowledge and language skills. The project was a new stage in the relationship between SydWest, Anglicare and the Metro West Foster Care Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team as this was the first African specific recruitment program with which the team had been involved.

The project was underpinned by a strength based approach, seeking to value the capacities of individuals and to mobilise the potential of African communities, and a community development approach, engaging communities through networks. A social learning theory approach was used to explain the existence of child abuse though intergenerational experience. This was used to motivate participants to break the cycle, by providing children with positive experiences through foster care. A key element of the project was establishing common ground between Community Services and African communities, by highlighting the shared motivation for African children to be raised in African families.

All components of the project were embedded in the concept of the 'African way' – focusing on word of mouth through relationship-based networks as the priority strategy.

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<sup>3</sup> 'African carers for African kids' (2011) Fostering Our Future Issue 25, Department of Family and Community Services



## **Publicity for information sessions**

The primary strategy for publicising sessions was word of mouth, using existing networks. Concerns around the impact of the child protection system and the need for African carers had been identified through SydWest consultations, and other SydWest projects were used as a pathway for promotion of the information sessions. All participants interviewed in the focus group and by telephone identified either being told directly about the information sessions or seeing information at SydWest while attending other activities there. SydWest was described as ‘the hub of information’ for the African communities.

The project was promoted through the following groups:

- African Men in Action
- African Sisters on the move
- African Leaders and Elders group
- Mt Druitt / Blacktown combined interagency meeting held 1 x month
- Multicultural Men Social Group

The Sudanese workers network facilitated by Anglicare was also used to promote the project.

In addition Abulla promoted the project through conversations with pastors of African churches, and spoke about the project at church gatherings and community events. Churches are well attended by members of African communities so this was seen as an important network to access.

Fliers were produced in Arabic for the Sudanese; Swahili for the Great Lake region; Ethiopian and English and were distributed at community events. While a number of fliers were distributed, they were not very effective in promoting attendance.

Local community radio and an article in the local paper the Blacktown Advocate were also used to promote information sessions. No African specific media were used. The rationale was that many African people have good English, and a degree of English competence was required to negotiate the foster care recruitment process, so it would be preferable to use English rather than African language media.

## **Information sessions**

General information sessions were conducted in English, except where they targeted specific communities. Interpreting service for Sudanese sessions was undertaken by Monica Biel from Anglicare. Abulla Agwa is Ethiopian and was able to interpret for Ethiopian participants.

**Table 1: African community information sessions**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Number attending</b>	<b>Target</b>
18.12.2010	Seniors Hall Blacktown	150	General African
18.1.2011	SydWest MSI	26	General African
20.1.2011	Auburn Diversity	12	General African
28.1.2011	Mt Druitt/Blacktown interagency	15	Service providers
3.2.2011	SydWest MSI	1	General African evening session for working people
4.2.2011	Auburn Diversity	11	Ethiopian
9.2.2011	SydWest MSI	7	Arabic and Dinka speakers
13.2.2011	SydWest MSI	14	Sudanese women's group
14.2.2011	SydWest MSI	2	Sudanese
15.3.2011	SydWest MSI	6	General African
3.4.2011	Anglicare	6	Sudanese
13.4.2011	SydWest MSI	6	General African

All sessions were held in the day, except for the session on 3 February 2011, which was specifically scheduled for the evening.

The project presentation included explanations about the Australian child protection system, Australian ideas about children's rights, and the impact of harm to children, and explained the function of foster care in Australia. This was seen as important information because African countries do not have statutory child protection systems. If there are concerns about the care of children they are dealt with by elders and family members. They can be dealt with quickly because community members already know the history of the family and the capacity of extended family members so there is no need for external assessments. Because elders have the authority to give direction in the community there is no need for court involvement. Children remain in the care of their communities even if they need to be raised by kin. The idea of raising a child who was not directly related to their carer was a new one for participants, and initially was challenging to understand. Participants had concerns about the responsibility of caring for young people where removal had been instigated by intergenerational conflict, and generally felt more confident about caring for younger children.

The content of presentations was assessed through a review of power points and attendance at a session. Information presented an accurate picture of the reasons why children come into care, necessary attributes of effective foster carers, support

available to carers, different types of foster care and an overview of what would be involved.

The eligibility requirements reflected the official requirements in relation to age (over 18 years), although in practice caseworkers would hesitate about recommending carers this age, except perhaps in mentoring or respite roles. Carers were described as needing to be able to read, write and speak English. The Foster Carer Application Form allows applicants to request an interpreter. The presentation also stated that applicants needed sufficient living space for another child. Different families are likely to have differing views about what constitutes sufficient space. Carers were advised that they could not have more than five children in their care.

### **Support for application process**

Application forms were given only to applicants who showed interest, either at the information sessions or subsequently when in contact with Abulla Agwa. Applicants attended SydWest if they needed assistance completing the form. This was part of the general assistance given by SydWest, and did not require applicants to make an appointment. The application forms were all returned to Abulla in the first instance for checking. This meant Abulla Agwa knew who had completed application forms and could ensure that applicants were identified as African. SydWest covered the cost of postage.

Abulla Agwa was then the contact point for applicants waiting for their applications to be processed by Carerlink, and could provide support to applicants if they were confused or concerned during the process.

Isobel Illa, Metro West Foster Care Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team, Family and Community Services also provided support to applicants. Les Cormack and Isobel Illa described the support requirements during the application and training phase as resource intense, primarily due to language constraints and a nervousness of undergoing a process that was unknown to the African women.

### **Feedback from participants regarding information sessions and application process**

Participants interviewed by telephone or focus group reported a high degree of satisfaction with the information sessions. Their comments indicated that information sessions had been very successful in motivating concern about the needs of African children who could not live with their parents, and had gone some way in explaining the idea of foster care where children were not related to their carers.

The telephone interview participants provided detailed information about how they had come to attend the foster care information sessions. All participants were familiar with SydWest and generally they had been involved in activities at SydWest such as Ladies' Day, sewing classes or volunteer work when they heard about the need for foster carers. Some participants had been approached directly by Abulla Agwa and invited to attend the information sessions. At least one had been recommended to Abulla Agwa by a friend. One had attended two different sessions before completing an application. Generally participants had little prior knowledge about fostering, although two participants had been involved in caring for refugee children in aid projects before coming to Australia. One participant commented on already knowing most of the people at the information session she attended because of prior contact with them as a volunteer at Sydwest. They described a strong community based interest in fostering, so that conversations about fostering, and encouragement to attend information sessions and apply were occurring among the women themselves.

It was somewhat difficult to engage participants in the focus group in discussion about the information sessions. While they were very ready to share the understanding of foster care they had gained from the information sessions, contrasting this with African practices, they gave only cursory comments when asked to rate the sessions. Since feedback in the telephone interviews confirmed a high degree of satisfaction with the information sessions in giving an overview of fostering and motivating them to apply, their reluctance to engage in detailed conversation about the information sessions did not appear to reflect dissatisfaction with that component of the project. Rather participants wanted to use the focus group to express concern with the time it was taking for their application to be processed by Carerlink.

Participants were very appreciative of the assistance that had been provided by Abulla Agwa and Ms Biel to complete forms. Participants who were proficient in English had little difficulty with the form, but those who were not, and who did not complete the form at the information session needed additional assistance, which they sought from Abulla Agwa or other staff at SydWest, or from neighbours or family members.

Several applicants had experienced the process as straightforward, and had progressed quite quickly to the Foster Carer training program. They felt they had been well supported and the training program had addressed many of their questions and concerns.

A number of participants in the focus group and telephone interviews were concerned about whether the time lag meant their applications had been refused, or had stalled for some reason. None of the group had received formal advice that their application had been declined but several felt that the delay must indicate that this was in fact the case. They also indicated that the delay made it difficult to make decisions such as whether to enrol in study, which would then limit their capacity to proceed with their application. Participants highlighted the anxiety they felt about

aspects of the project, such as the police check and home check. One participant noted that in Africa police are only involved if there has been a big breakdown in the community, so involvement of the police is a source of fear. Another participant noted that her husband had been a policeman in Africa but this did not make the idea of police involvement any easier. Concerns were also raised about the home check, in particular whether their homes would be judged as adequate and whether their children would say the right things. The level of anxiety about being checked and judged appeared higher than would usually be articulated by foster applicants. Participants also identified difficulty identifying suitable referees, because their friends had not been in Australia long enough to satisfy the requirements.

Other participants expressed frustration about their inability to meet perceived requirements to be a carer, in particular having adequate spoken and written English, and having fewer than six children. They felt these requirements showed a lack of understanding of African families' capacity to care for children describing how large families provided children with a range of opportunities for relationships, and could meet children's needs effectively. They also believed that through the use of interpreters Caseworkers could support families to be carers even if they didn't have strong English skills, since fluent English was not a requirement for effective parenting.

Accommodation was also a barrier for some applicants. In one instance a participant had been advised she would need to fix the yard of her rented property, but her landlord was slow to do so.

Some participants used the words adoption and foster care interchangeably, and it was not clear that they understood the difference. Some participants were also clear in the telephone interviews that they saw fostering as an opportunity for employment, given the difficulties they had experienced finding work through other means. Another participant identified concerns that some applicants were primarily seeing foster care as an opportunity to earn money. Participants emphasised the value of local knowledge about who would be good at fostering, and the networking that had occurred in encouraging specific women who were seen as having the right abilities and motivation. As one participant said 'The African community know each other and they know who is good with kids and those who aren't.'

Focus group participants had many questions about foster care, and were keen to use the session to gain more information, for example about whether and how contact would occur. This appeared to reflect the usual transition from the initial information session to the more detailed questions that are generally addressed during the training and assessment process.

## **Project outcomes**

Abulla identified thirty-six people completed applications directly as a result of the African project and Table 2 provides information about their country of birth.

**Table 2: African applicants: Cultural background**

Country of birth	Number of applicants
Southern Sudanese	23
Liberian	6
Ghanaian	2
Ligerian	2
Ethiopian	2
Sierra Leonean	3

When interviewed, Abulla understood that six applicants had been declined due to issues such as unsuitable accommodation, husband not interested and a positive Working With Children Check hit.

A group of six carers from Sudan and Liberia have completed the Shared Stories Shared Lives training course which was in English and Dinka, with the support of Monica Biel from Anglicare and Abulla Agwa from SydWest, and two of their colleagues.

Two applicants in the telephone sample reported that they had completed Foster Carer training and one has a foster child placed with her.

# Greek Project

## Project Rationale

The Greek community is well established in Sydney's southeast and inner west, following significant Greek migration in the period after World War II. Greek children who are removed for child protection reasons can often be placed with extended family, and no unmet needs for Greek carers for Greek children have been identified. However Greek culture emphasises the communal and public over the private sphere, and Greek values include hospitality and acting in an honourable way. The project targeted the Greek community because of the possibility that families who had strong ties to the Greek community would have a value set that would fit well with the demands of fostering, and might be more responsive than the broader community.<sup>4</sup> The possible potential of the Greek community was highlighted by the work of a specific Greek carer who had fostered the cultural connections of a child in her care who was not Greek, recognising the importance of culture in a child's development.

The local government areas (LGAs) chosen for the project were Rockdale, Canterbury and Marrickville. It is estimated that 26,756 people speak Greek at home in this area, with the largest population residing in Canterbury LGA. 40% of the community are aged over 55 years.<sup>5</sup>

The project was based on the understanding that foster care of unrelated children was not a familiar concept within the Greek community, so it was important to address myths and stereotypes, highlighting children's needs and vulnerability, clarifying the different kinds of foster care used, and the reasons why children come into care. The engagement strategy was planned to involve community networks, social and religious leaders, family and friends, mainstream and local media, ethnic press and community resources. It was anticipated that project partners would target recruitment activities to community cohorts that would satisfy Community Services eligibility criteria.<sup>6</sup>

Responsibility for delivering sessions to potential Greek foster carers was shared between St George MRC, Metro MRC and the Greek Orthodox community. Metro MRC and St George MRC arranged for an existing staff member to extend their hours to promote and facilitate the information sessions. The Greek Orthodox community employed a bilingual worker specifically to organise and facilitate the sessions. SSI's project coordinator Trina Soulos worked with the facilitators who had been nominated by the partner organisations. She also developed a range of materials to support the project. These were an information booklet, a PowerPoint Presentation,

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<sup>4</sup> Greek community profile prepared by Trina Soulos, Cultural Perspectives

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> SSI(2011) Multicultural Foster Carer Recruitment Project End of Project Report

a poster, a letterhead, an advertisement for newspapers, and a Greek language advertisement for radio. The poster, booklet and advertisements all had the slogan of 'Protect our generations'. The poster and PowerPoints included the logos of the partner agencies and the Fostering NSW logo. The information booklet had the SSI logo and the Fostering NSW logo.

Preparation for the project included an interview with an experienced Greek carer about the experience of foster care. Quotes from the interview were used in material developed for the presentation. They included comments about the positive fit between Greek culture and the needs of children in foster care such as *'The European way of giving this crazy amount of love really works for children. My squeezes are like medicine for them.....Of course you might need the help of an occasional book for a Yaya (grandmother)...We give them a positive congregation of loved ones. A Greek household can provide something special... It's no problem in a Greek family – we always cook for more'*.

### **Publicity for information sessions**

Publicity through radio and newspapers was organised by SSI, coordinated with the dates of sessions conducted by the partner agencies. Pre-recorded radio advertisements in Greek were prepared and aired, along with an interview with a Greek carer on a popular Greek radio program. SBS used the segment in addition to the paid time. The radio advertisements extended over eight weeks. A total of ten advertisements were placed in Greek newspapers Greek Herald, O'Kosmos and Community Horizons and in local newspapers Inner West Courier and St George Leader over a period of ten weeks. Advertisements in the Greek papers were in Greek only. Advertisements in the community papers were in English only. In addition information sessions were listed in various free community event listings in local and ethnic press. The media purchase for the combined project (Arabic and Greek) came to just over \$10,000.

Project design was undertaken at a reduced fee of \$3,300, (market value quote was \$11,104) and printing of posters and handouts was undertaken at Cultural Perspectives. Translation of project materials was also undertaken at the substantially discounted cost of \$3,120 for both languages. Cultural Perspectives invoiced SSI for \$61,000 and undertook the project as part of the 'at cost work' it does for SSI. The remaining funds were directed to SSI's costs in relation to project management and ongoing advocacy in relation to out of home care.

Posters had the same photo and look as the advertisements, and were in Greek and English. Posters were displayed at Metro MRC and St George, Greek language schools, at key events at the Greek Festival of Sydney, and at Brighton Le Sands Public School, Ramsgate Public School and San Souci Public School, which are schools with a high proportion of second-generation Greek families.



## Information sessions

**Table 3: Attendance at Greek sessions**

Date/Time	Project partner	Location	Participants
25.3.2011 10am	St George MRC	St George MRC, Rockdale	0
31.3.2011 7pm	Greek Orthodox Community	Greek Club, Lakemba	7 <sup>7</sup>
8.4.2011 10am	St George MRC	St George MRC, Rockdale	3
13.4.2011 7pm	Greek Orthodox Community	Greek Club, Lakemba	4
10.5.2011 6pm	Metro MRC	Earlwood Public School	9

Facilitators received one to one training to deliver the information sessions. Agencies were paid \$833.33 + GST for each session. This payment covered preparation, publicity and one to one recruiting of participants, organising the venue and any catering, delivering sessions and any follow up with participants. The project coordinator met with facilitators individually and briefed them on the material, to ensure that they were able to present it. The language used for the session depended on the needs of participants attending. Facilitators were very positive about the level of support provided, and felt the combination of individual preparation and the well-prepared and presented support materials made the task of presenting straightforward. The two facilitators interviewed noted that while prior to the sessions they had a general awareness of fostering, they had learnt a good deal from the sessions, particularly regarding the different kinds of fostering. Both noted that the association with the partner agencies was important in promoting a topic like fostering, which could raise a level of discomfort because of the association with 'DocS' and the removal of children. Both felt that the endorsement of trusted agencies whose logos were respected would help people be more open and less hesitant.

Community Services staff with significant foster care experience attended each session as an advisor. Feedback on the role of the Community Services staff was very positive, with facilitators noting the benefit of having an experienced worker available to answer complex questions.

Both facilitators noted the challenge of limited time and competing demands which meant they could only undertake the limited number of groups they had committed to, and weren't in a position to extend the project. They were aware of much more that could be done to take the message to different groups, and that in many ways this was just the beginning of the conversation. One facilitator had arranged for a

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<sup>7</sup> These figures are from the SSI End of Project Report. The facilitator corrected the number previously provided for the End of Project report.

colleague to do a presentation using the resources to another Greek seniors group, from the perspective that it was important to communicate directly with seniors because they had influence within the family. The other facilitator spoke of ongoing conversations with people from her network who had attended the session.

The response to publicity for the sessions was different for each of the groups. All but one of the participants at the two Greek Club sessions facilitated by the Greek Orthodox Community were aged over 50 years, and Greek was used for this presentation. Participants at these sessions mostly came through hearing the Greek language radio advertisements and also through the Greek Club newsletter. One younger participant came to one of these sessions with her children because she had already been thinking about fostering, and the session provided an opportunity to move on in the process.

Attendance at the St George Migrant Resource centre was in response to newspaper advertisements.<sup>8</sup> One participant had already adopted from overseas and this had prompted her interest in fostering.

Two participants at the Earlwood Public School session came as a result of publicity through the school newsletter and on site. The remainder came through personal contacts with the facilitator within and outside the school.

## **Support for application process**

The initial plan for the project was to undertake a separate session for Greek applicants who wanted support for with their application process. As no applicants who needed such support were identified, the additional session was not provided. Interested participants were able to take application forms, and were offered the opportunity to call the session facilitator if they needed further assistance. Two possible applicants were identified, but were not contacted after the sessions.

## **Project Outcomes**

The Manager Casework, Metro Central Foster Care Recruitment Team undertook to look out for Greek applicants, and advise if any had come through the process. One applicant has come through for a KIDS check, but has not yet progressed through Carerlink to the Foster Care Recruitment Team.

The facilitator for the Greek Orthodox Community sessions noted that participants had largely responded to the advertisements in Greek media, and that it seemed that publicity in the Greek language had attracted an older group of participants,

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<sup>8</sup> It was not possible to interview the facilitator of the session, so information about the make up of this session came from the Family and Community Services staff member who attended.

who were beyond the age range that would be considered for fostering. Participants felt they had time to give to children, but weren't really in a position to provide fulltime care for children. They would be able to pass information on to their own children. The facilitator felt that the Greek language material wasn't necessary or even useful for younger participants. While they may speak Greek, younger people would be unlikely to be confident in reading formal Greek.

None of the participants to the other Greek sessions appeared to have responded to Greek media. At least some of the participants at these sessions were concerned that their children were too young for them to consider fostering at present, but they were interested about the possibility in the future.

It was difficult to test the proposition that the culture of the Greek community might lead to greater willingness to care for children outside their community and to understand the significance of maintaining cultural ties. Most participants had quite limited understanding of the reasons why foster care was needed, so much of the discussion focussed on this. One facilitator noted that while Greek community members would respond readily if they knew a child in the community was in crisis, it was more challenging to discuss the prospect of caring for an unknown child from out of the community.

The facilitators both indicated scope for further promotion of the need for foster carers through relationship based networking, which was seen as the best way to promote foster care. They noted that the short time frame of the project had placed pressure on facilitators to work very quickly, which meant there had not been a lot of time to promote activities. Whilst both facilitators believed they would personally take their enhanced knowledge of foster care into their personal networks, they were not able to prioritise this now the project was finished. The small amount of funding had been enough to support their involvement in the project, but there was no capacity to develop formal plans for continuing.

The Community Services staff member who had attended the session commented that in her experience it was unrealistic to expect to see quick results in foster care recruitment. She noted that participants at the information sessions appeared much less knowledgeable than those who usually attended information sessions when these were held by Community Services, suggesting they had been engaged in the sessions much earlier in the process of considering fostering. She felt that potential applicants needed time to mull over information, and then multiple stimuli over time to prompt them to move onto an application. She felt the project had been a good start, and now there was potential to build on it through networking.

A positive incidental outcome was the development of a connection between the Community Services Manager Casework who was responsible for assisting at the sessions, and the facilitators. She anticipated having some future opportunities to speak at migrant services inter-agencies, and to work more closely with culturally specific staff at the MRCs and strategic schools.

# Arabic Speaking Project

## Project rationale

For over a decade Community Services has recruited Muslim foster carers through a program based at Bankstown. The Muslim Women's Association was involved from the beginning of the program in supporting recruitment and participating in reference groups. More recently the Muslim Foster Care Project has developed a broader focus on recruitment and support of culturally diverse carers, and is now known as the Multicultural Foster Care Program. Currently staff from Arabic, Turkish and Vietnamese backgrounds work for the program, recruiting, training and supporting carers. Unlike mainstream foster care recruitment teams within Community Services, the Multicultural Foster Care Program's involvement with carers is not time limited. While case management for children is the responsibility of the child's case worker, the Multicultural Foster Care offers ongoing support, and provides cultural consultations across three Departmental regions. Ongoing access to a caseworker who can provide carer support in community languages was seen as a key part of effective involvement of carers from culturally diverse backgrounds. Children are placed in long term care only with carers from their community, but in emergencies short term arrangements may be made across different communities, provided the child and carer both speak a common language and no other option is available with carers from the child's community.

There is an ongoing demand for Arabic carers, and the project involved both a continuation of the pre-existing partnership with the Muslim Women's Association, and contact with several agencies without previous involvement in foster care recruitment.

Arabic speakers come from a wide variety of Middle Eastern countries. While some Arabic communities such as the Lebanese community have been present in Australia for many decades, others such as the Iraqi community are more recent arrivals, and many such recent arrivals come to Australia as refugees or humanitarian entrants. The partner agencies were located across South Western Sydney in Liverpool, Fairfield, Bankstown and Canterbury Local Government Areas. In the 2006 census Arabic was the most common non-English language spoken in the South West subregion, and was spoken at home by 4.3% of the population.<sup>9</sup>

Responsibility for delivering sessions to potential Arabic foster carers was shared between the Muslim Women's Association, Fairfield MRC, Liverpool MRC and the Arab Council of Australia. SSI's project coordinator Trina Soulos worked with the facilitators who had been nominated by the partner organisations. She also developed a range of materials to support the project. These were an information booklet, a PowerPoint Presentation, a poster, a letterhead, an advertisement for newspapers, and an Arabic language advertisement for radio. The poster, booklet

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<sup>9</sup> WSROC South West Subregion Regional Profile

and advertisements all had the slogan of 'Protect our generations'. The poster and PowerPoints included the logos of the partner agencies and the Fostering NSW logo. The information booklet had the SSI logo and the Fostering NSW logo.

Preparation for the project included an interview with an experienced Arabic carer about the experience of foster care. Quotes from the interview were used in material developed for the presentation. They included comments about the benefits for Arabic children being fostered by an Arabic family such as *'Kids get excited to see some of the foods that their gran cooked on my table. ...Kids feel more relaxed in their own culture. We have respect and understand each other...Whether the kids are from DoCS or they're your own grandchildren, it doesn't matter. Kids are kids – they don't change. These kids come into my house as part of my family....I don't have any family here in Australia, so if something were to happen to me I realise that my kids would be in the same situation as these foster children. I would hope that someone from our community would help them. That's why I foster. I am happy to be involved in this job.'*

While migrants from Arabic speaking countries would not be familiar with the formal child protection system, Nahia Agha from the Multicultural Foster Care Program noted that the Prophet Muhammad was a foster child, and explained that this provided Muslim applicants with an affirming framework for involvement in fostering. She also noted that the Program was now working on recruitment of non-Muslim Arabic speakers.

## **Publicity for information sessions**

Publicity through radio and newspapers was organised by SSI, coordinated with the dates of sessions conducted by the partner agencies. Radio publicity began a fortnight before the sessions and extended for eight weeks. Pre-recorded radio advertisements in Arabic were prepared and aired on SBS Arabic, Sawt el Ghad and 2ME. SBS used the segments more times than the paid booking. A total of nine advertisements were placed in Arabic newspapers An-Nahar, El Telegraph, Al Anwar and Al-Iraqi and in local newspapers Liverpool Leader, Fairfield Advance and Canterbury Bankstown Express. Advertisements in the Arabic papers were in Arabic only. Advertisements in the community papers were in English only. In addition information sessions were listed in various free community event listings in local and ethnic press. The press advertisements were placed over a period of six weeks. The media purchase for the combined project (Arabic and Greek) came to just over \$10,000.

Posters had the same photo and look as the advertisements, and were in Arabic and English.<sup>10</sup> Posters were displayed at the partner organisations, the local government funded English classes (ACL), University of Western Sydney, TAFE Liverpool and

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<sup>10</sup> For project costs see the section Publicity for Information Sessions in the Greek project section.

Bankstown, local food shops, Centrelink, playgroup halls, mosques and libraries. Staff from the Arab Council of Australia noted in particular that it was helpful having their own logo on posters as this was widely recognised, and also that they felt the posters were more acceptable because they didn't carry an identifiable 'DoCS' logo.

## Information sessions

**Table 4: Arabic Information Sessions<sup>11</sup>**

Date/Time	Project Partner	Location	Participants
21/2/2011 10am	Arab Council of Australia	Arab Council, Bankstown	10
9/3/2011 10am	Arab Council of Australia	Arab Council, Bankstown	4
21/3/2011 10am	Liverpool MRC	Liverpool MRC	2
30/3/2011 10am	Muslim Women's Association	MWA, Lakemba	18
1/4/2011 10am	Fairfield MRC	Community Hall	2
4/4/2011 10am	Liverpool MRC	Liverpool MRC	10
8/4/2011	Fairfield MRC	Community Hall	13

Facilitators received one to one training to deliver the information sessions. Agencies were paid \$833.33 + GST for each session. This payment covered preparation, publicity and one to one recruiting of participants, organising the venue and any catering, delivering sessions and any follow up with participants. The project coordinator met with facilitators individually and briefed them over several hours on the material, to ensure that they were able to present it. Facilitators felt well prepared, and were confident about their capacity to present material. The Muslim Women's Association facilitator had extensive previous experience from involvement from her role as a partner in delivering foster care training, but arranged for several staff to attend as well so that they could gain more understanding of fostering. The other facilitators noted the way the presentation highlighted the support role of Community Services. A number of participants in the session had very little knowledge of reasons why children were removed, and the sessions helped them address fears about removal of children.

Arabic speaking Community Services staff from the Multicultural Foster Care Program attended each session as an advisor. Facilitators saw their involvement as valuable because of their expert knowledge, and also because it promoted positive messages about partnership.

The Australia Arab Council sessions were largely attended by women who had been invited by the facilitators from regular groups run by the Council. All these

<sup>11</sup> These figures are from the SSI End of Project report.

participants were familiar with the Australia Arab Council, and had a strong relationship of trust with the agency. A couple of participants who were not known to the facilitators came apparently in response to publicity on the radio. Staff noted that participants had come with confusion and fear about the child protection system, and had not been aware of situations where a parent might be hospitalised with no one to care for children, or where children were exposed to violence, and needed to be protected. Participants related to the idea that if they were in difficult circumstances they would want their child to be with an Arabic speaking family. Agency staff noted that the time frame for organising sessions had been tight, and felt more time would have helped to promote sessions more widely and increase interest.

One of the sessions conducted in English by Liverpool MRC specifically targeted local Arabic speaking service providers with a view to encouraging them to spread information about the need for carers. One worker was contacted by phone for feedback and indicated that the information was new to her, and well presented. At least one participant at the sessions conducted by Arab Council of Australia was also a local service provider.

The second session conducted at Liverpool MRC targeted Sudanese Arabic speakers and was publicised on local radio, with posters in local Sudanese shops, and at the local library. Because she did not speak Arabic, the facilitator worked with an Arabic speaking colleague as an interpreter. A particular focus of this session was on helping participants understand why children might be removed, and to explain why carers were needed. The facilitator indicated that some participants were not so interested in actually becoming foster carers as in understanding some of the background information about the child protection system. This may explain why one of the phone participants could not recall attending a session on foster care. The other participant who agreed to be interviewed indicated that she attended various sessions at the MRC, and this one happened to be about foster care. She was not in a position to consider applying because of family health concerns, but appreciated attending the session because she had not understood about fostering before.

The Muslim Women's Association session was integrated into a wider consultation process that was held with a larger group of Arabic speaking women, some of whom identified fostering as an area of interest. Those women were then invited to attend the information session. Women attending came from a range of Arabic speaking countries including Iraq and Jordan. The group included participants for whom this was the first information they had accessed regarding the need for fostering and the role of the foster carer.

The presentations arranged by Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre included one to a group of Iraqi women.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This information was provided by the Multicultural Foster Care Team.

## ***Support for application process***

Originally it had been proposed to run one combined session to assist Arabic participants complete application forms, but this strategy was not implemented as there did not appear to be demand for this kind of support. Participants were able to take away application forms and could ask for support as needed either from the partner agencies.

Staff from the Multicultural Foster Care Program identified challenges generally for applicants from culturally diverse backgrounds negotiating the Carerlink process. Applicants approved by the program can receive training and assessment in Arabic, Turkish or Vietnamese. Generally they will have some English, having lived in Australia for some years and have found strategies to negotiate health care and education services but will need the support of an interpreter to have more complex conversations. Program staff find that Community Services caseworkers who are responsible for managing case work related to children in foster care are often not willing to use the telephone interpreter service to assist them to communicate with carers, and sometimes Program staff become involved in sorting out difficulties of communication, and encouraging caseworkers to use interpreters for more complex conversations. They noted that applicants often find the Carerlink call centre process daunting. Using interpreters may not be sufficient, because the call centre staff don't have the knowledge of fostering to help participants address issues and concerns in relation to their applications. Program staff are also concerned that because Carerlink only operates in business hours applications can drop out because their referees cannot be contacted or don't understand messages left for them. The Program staff were concerned that it took a long time for applicants to come through the process, which increased the possibility that applicants would drop out.

The Program team and Carerlink have had various negotiations about how to address these concerns. Staff felt that they had very different styles, with the Carerlink team operating as a call centre focused on compliance, and the Multicultural Foster Care Program wanting to be flexible wherever this facilitated recruitment. Currently they have an agreement with Carerlink that if Carerlink have tried three times unsuccessfully to call referees they will refer the application back to the Multicultural Foster Care Program. The Program staff note that it would be preferable if these attempts were made within a short period, such as within a week.

## ***Project Outcomes***

Agencies that participated in the program reported increased understanding of foster care and the child protection system. The project forged some new relationships between community groups and the Multicultural Foster Care Program. Concrete benefits of these relationships include an information session on fostering run for Vietnamese parents attending a playgroup supported by Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, and discussions about involvement with the Assyrian community through Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre. An agency worker who



attended the service provider session at Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre had plans to run a session about the need for Arabic speaking foster carers for parents of children at the school where she worked.

One of the Multicultural Foster Care Program staff noted that overall participants in the information sessions had very little knowledge of the child protection system and fostering, and for a number their motivation to attend was to better understand the system, and to address anxiety and confusion about the circumstances in which children could be removed. Staff at the Arab Council of Australia noted that an unforeseen benefit of involvement in the program had been helping them better understand the scope for Community Services to assist families without removing children, and on several occasions since the information sessions they had encouraged families to contact Community Services in these circumstances, with positive results. Such responses suggest that there may be benefit in more general information sessions regarding the child protection system. These could both address fears and misunderstandings and provide a first point of contact for prospective foster carers. However this general community education is beyond the resources of the Multicultural Foster Care Program. Some of these issues are addressed by the Burnside Keep Them Safe program which is run independent of Community Services by a range of non-government agencies. To date this program is only available in English. This project appeared to identify benefits of direct involvement of Community Services staff in community education, working in partnership with trusted community agencies.

Muslim Women's Association identified three motivated applicants who took application forms and were encouraged to contact the Multicultural Foster Care Program if needed. The Multicultural Foster Care Program had not received applications from these applicants through Carerlink, and Muslim Women's Association staff did not know whether applicants had proceeded in their applications. Some Iraqi women from the Fairfield session also took applications but the status of these was not known.

## Conclusions

### **What worked in relation to utilising networks to reach target communities, developing effective strategies for communication and community education around foster care, and in providing one to one support to applicants?**

Overall word of mouth was the most effective means of bringing participants to attend information sessions. The success of the African project in drawing community members into the project highlighted the value of long term promotion of the need for foster carers, and the motivating power of the message of keeping children within their community.

The experience of project partners highlighted that recruitment is not an event, but a process. Potential applicants need time to come to an understanding of the child protection system, to recognise the need for carers within their community and to assess their own capacity to be a carer and ensure that their family are supportive, or be encouraged by another community member to apply.

The experience of the African project also suggests that individual follow up of applicants is critical to success.

### **Community education**

Themes that emerged from the interviews with project staff and participants included:

1. It became evident from participant feedback and from the projects' staff that project partners, with the support of Community Services staff, needed to demystify how the child protection system works in Australia and to communicate about the reasoning behind the child protection system's capacity to remove children at risk of serious harm before people were ready to hear about the need for foster carers.
2. The use of established community networks to actively encourage people with positive attributes to apply was a recurring theme in the feedback received. There were some differences between how the different networks were used to promote the idea of foster care and to access possible applicants e.g. project staff focused on particular groups of possible applicants. This strategy appears to be more strategic and culturally relevant than a broad reach into community as often noted in mainstream foster carer recruitment campaigns.

3. There may have been some differences in how often people heard fostering being promoted during the process. The African project utilised a number of venues, networking groups and cultural events to promote the issue. Consequently participants may have had multiple opportunities to hear about fostering within their church, networking group, or cultural meeting, whereas the Arabic and Greek groups may only have had one opportunity.

### **One to one support**

One-to-one support was most effective for African applicants who had two very motivated facilitators for whom this support was their core business and active involvement by Community Services staff to ensure applicants succeeded in the subsequent foster carer training.

One-to-one support proved more difficult for SSI facilitators who were asked to run sessions but weren't anticipating having to follow applicants through the application process or pursue applicants to initiate or complete their applications.

## **How were projects able to reach and motivate potential applicants to apply?**

### ***African project***

The African project's success was primarily because of the following factors:

- the groundwork of identifying and accessing applicants was already resolved within the context of established community networks, existing groups and projects
- the foster carer project was a continuation of other projects already underway at SydWest i.e. the Intergenerational Conflict project
- access to direct communication channels to reach readily identified and closely networked communities
- strong community feeling about African children being raised outside their culture
- personal and professional commitment of the facilitators to the well being of African children and young people
- direct targeting of potential candidates
- two interviews suggested that, due to limited employment opportunities for African women because of English language constraints, fostering was a viable employment option or income source. This idea was not universally supported by other participants.

### ***Arabic and Greek projects***

A number of themes emerged from the interviews within the Arabic and Greek projects:

1. The Arabic and Greek projects were largely a ‘first hearing’ of the foster care story, except for the Muslim Women’s Association who have long involvement with this issue. Many participants in the Information sessions were motivated to finding out about how the child protection system works and how children and young people came into care.
2. The Arabic communities were actually made up of a number of groups, some of whom may have been quite recent arrivals. Consequently, using the support organisations’ networks had pros and cons. The pros included the personal connections the project staff had with community were effective in getting participants to come to the Information sessions. However, the participants closely networked to the support organisations were not necessarily at the right time in life to foster, or, because of family issues, their circumstances were not right to consider fostering.
3. The project resulted in new relationships being created for Community Services’ Multicultural Fostering Team with the Arabic communities, and consequently, the creation of potential new audiences. These may lead to applicants in the future. Three possible applicants were identified through these relationships but at the time of writing there was concern the applicants may have been lost in the system.
4. For most Greek participants, the information sessions were first hearing about foster care. Within the Greek project the use of Greek publicity rather than English may have resulted in the bias of the audience reached i.e. the older age group. Greek families were interested in the concept of fostering, but they may have been more motivated to pursue the application process if Greek children needed care.
5. Although for most participants the Information sessions were a first hearing, participants may become applicants in the longer term.

### **Was the information given about foster care accurate, realistic, and consistent with good foster care practice?**

During the course of this evaluation, the presentations utilised by the African, Greek and Arabic projects were reviewed. The information being presented was accurate and consistent with the information presented in mainstream foster carer recruitment campaigns.

The session information managed well the delicate balance between presenting an up-front realistic of picture of the challenges of fostering without ‘scaring’ prospective applicants. The sessions managed this similarly to the way mainstream-fostering agencies would do.

All three projects noted it was helpful having Community Services staff present to answer questions, particularly about the child protection system and Community Services' role, responsibilities and expectations of foster carers.

### **Which publicity strategies were most successful, and for which communities?**

For the Arabic and Greek projects the following issues presented:

1. We had to rely largely on feedback from facilitators rather than directly from participants for Greek and Arabic.
2. Overall most participants came through personal contact with the facilitators, or through their organisations. For future projects, it would be useful to ask participants on the day how they found out about the session.
3. The Sudanese radio via Liverpool MRC was mentioned as effective for that session.
4. Only a minority of participants came in response to posters.
5. The Greek Club newsletter had some response for the Information session held at the Greek club.
6. There was some response to Greek radio program, which involved an interview with a carer.
7. One session had no response at all.

For the African project the most successful strategy to secure participation in the Information sessions was word of mouth between the attendees at SydWest. This included direct approaches to suitable applicants. These approaches were followed up energetically with those who expressed an interest in attending the sessions.

### **Were there strategies that were not successful?**

The African project worker believed that printed media was the least effective in disseminating information to the African communities. Proficiency in English was a contributing factor but most significantly, print media is not a usual communication method in African communities.

The Greek and Arabic campaigns used both word of mouth and radio and newspaper publicity, but word of mouth was much more successful and only a handful of participants were identified as having come in response to radio or newspapers. Greek radio was the most successful, but did not attract the target age group needed

for foster care. Radio also appeared to be helpful in attracting Sudanese participants to Liverpool MRC, and possibly one participant to the Arab Council. These findings suggest that radio may be superior to print, but the sample was too small to be sure.

### **How did participants experience the process of making an application?**

The following themes emerged for participants undertaking the application process:

1. The African applicants had varied experiences with the application process. For the small number of participants who had some proficiency in English or had had previous experience with fostering, the form was relatively straightforward.
2. For the majority, the form was confusing and difficult to understand. Most applicants did not understand the language and required varying levels of assistance from Abulla Agwa or others to complete the form.
3. Many participants were not prepared for how long the process took. Some participants variously interpreted the delay as 'something being wrong with their application' or 'I am not suitable' or one participant thought there were 'no more children to foster'.
4. Most participants were anxious about some aspects of the application process such as the need for police checks and home checks. Their understanding of why these checks were required was made clear when Community Services staff made contact.
5. A recurring difficulty was nominating referees with good English and who were available between 9:00am – 5:00pm when Carerlink made their follow up calls.

### **How satisfied were participants with support provided through the project?**

The facilitators in Greek and Arabic groups reported high satisfaction with support provided to them, and satisfaction from participants. There was also very positive feedback about Community Services staff who attended sessions.

The African participants also reported very high levels of satisfaction with the support received from Abulla Agwa and Monica Biel. The support was very practical and began from first approach, continued through the filling of the application form to posting the forms to Carerlink. Community Services staff support was deemed highly effective in assisting participants to move their interest onto the next phase, Foster carer training. The support received at this stage of the process, although intensive for Community Services staff, was seen as invaluable in the process.

## **What was the role of information sessions in assisting participants to make an application?**

The Information sessions were essential for the African applicants. As described above, the session facilitators shepherded the applicants through the process and kept track of their progress throughout the application process.

The Arabic and Greek facilitators did not remain involved to this extent and in some instances didn't have a central point of contact with applicants in the way SydWest did. Two Greek and three Arabic participants were identified as possible applicants. The Greek applicants in particular may have applied independently to the project as they were already clearly interested and informed.

The impression gained was that there was a higher degree of motivation for the African applicants however it is hard to tell what factors related to the applicants' motivation and what related to facilitator skill and support.

The sessions organised by SSI were well-organised, with very well researched and presented material, and carefully targeted publicity. SSI fully fulfilled the requirements of the project. The different outcomes between the SydWest and SSI delivery in no way reflected on the quality of the information sessions.

## **What issues and barriers impacted on the project which could be addressed in future marketing and information strategies targeting applicants from culturally and linguistically diverse communities?**

A number of issues were identified that may be useful to consider for future ventures:

1. Need to communicate about child protection first. Findings from the project suggest that foster care recruitment involves three waves:
  - Understanding child protection system – why children are removed. This has the flow-on effect of building trust with Community Services.
  - Understanding need for foster care – building commitment from community leaders.
  - Targeted recruitment – seeking involvement of leaders to encourage likely candidates.
2. It is important to maintain ongoing relationships between Community Services and community partners to keep the waves flowing. This is time consuming and is additional to the Foster Carer Support Teams usual activities. This has obvious implications for staffing and the Teams' capacities to attend to other duties and activities.
3. It is important to understand where communities are in relation to the migration process and take this into account in future planning and

targeting of groups. Relevant issues include the experience of refugees, forced migration and the short and longer term impact of trauma. These issues have implications in the recruitment, targeting of groups and the assessment process.

4. Expectations should be clarified in relation to eligibility criteria:
  - the number of children
  - the level of English proficiency required
  - housing – own bedroom.

These criteria are not realistic for Sudanese applicants.

5. Issues were identified regarding level of English needed by carers during the assessment process and the challenge of accessing interpreters/sessional MRC workers to interpret for Community Services' assessments and training. This requirement is very resource intensive for Community Services' Metro West Region. The issue has less impact for Metro South West because of bi-lingual caseworkers however not all positions on the team are targeted bilingual, which presents issues in recruitment.
6. Need to consider long term how carers can be supported if they have limited English. While they may be effective carers, with strategies and supports to negotiate children's needs, they may not necessarily be able to communicate in English with caseworkers about complex issues. This has implications regarding which children they can care for, and general caseworker capacity to provide them with support. It also has implications around training issues for caseworkers working with carers in the longer term.
7. There was a significant difficulty of Carerlink's call centre approach for applicants with limited English and/or who are not confident about call centre processes. Using interpreters will help to some extent. An overview of Carerlink's applicant recruitment process and business rules is attached (Appendix 1)
8. Delays in applicants getting through Carerlink before they can have info session, training and assessment. A solution may possibly be to prepare participants in the Information sessions more explicitly about the process.

### **What are the costs associated with the project? (both financial and staff time)**

The issues identified in association with costs include:

1. Significant amounts of additional time was given to the project by all partner services which was absorbed by employing bodies, or through unpaid work. Staff



were reluctant to provide details of this. However, it should be noted that if all hours worked were paid for, the project would have not been able to deliver the amount of work undertaken within their budgets.

The time costs were also significant for Community Services staff, and each Region described higher investment of staff time per applicant than the norm.

2. Another challenge for project partners was the challenges of time. The project partners needed to access participants quickly to ensure their brief was fulfilled. The initial brief emphasised the participants' satisfaction with Information session presentations. There is clear indication that the presentations were fine and met participants' initial needs. The challenge for the Greek and Arabic projects was not delivering the material, but making the required connections with likely candidates. Recruiting prospective foster care applicants is a process not an event.

The African success appears to be due to the depth of their campaign, which primarily focused on building and enhancing existing work.

For the Arabic and Greek projects, they were at the first step of the process. Their most significant challenge was time.

## Recommendations

- i) Foster care recruitment to specific cultural/linguistic communities is most likely to be effective where long term partnerships (ie 12 months or more) are established between Community Services and community partners.
- ii) Consideration needs to be given to the roles and responsibilities of participants, and the long term sustainability of the project.
- iii) While it is helpful if Community Services staff involved in partnerships with community agencies are bi-lingual this is not essential.
- iv) It should not be assumed that individual worker commitment alone is sufficient to sustain ongoing recruitment activities. Funding may not be necessary to prompt initial involvement in recruitment projects, but is likely to increase sustained agency commitment, and to ensure that partner agencies are committed even when key workers move on.
- v) Recruitment projects should aim to promote multiple opportunities within the community for potential carers to hear about the need for foster care.
- vi) Word of mouth (ie hearing from someone you know and trust) is the most effective means of prompting interest in foster care. Mass media (ie newspapers and radio) can support and direct applicants to agencies, but have less impact than a personal encounter with someone who is a foster carer, or has had a meaningful conversation about fostering.
- vii) Before members of culturally/linguistically diverse communities can engage with the possibility of being a foster carer they need to understand why children may enter care, and feel confident about the role they would play in the child protection system. Meeting Community Services staff together with trusted community representatives helps build credibility.
- viii) In planning foster care recruitment for a specific community consideration should be given to the particular migration experience and characteristics of community members. Expectations of foster carers in relation to English language skills, housing, number of children and access to English speaking referees should be considered. The likelihood that applicants may also be affected by trauma related to war and conflict should also be recognised. It may be unrealistic to expect that criteria for culturally/linguistically specific communities can be the same as those for the general community, but if criteria are varied, it is important that the focus remains on the carer's capacity to meet the child's needs. For projects engaging with well-established communities caution should be exercised before advertising in community languages as this may inadvertently attract participants who are too old to foster.

- ix) Projects need to be resourced to provide support for applicants throughout the assessment and training period and beyond, especially if applicants have limitations in relation to written or spoken English.
- x) Recruitment projects should include a capacity for individual follow up of potential applicants to ensure they have adequate support to negotiate the application process. The Carerlink process may not have the capacity to effectively process applications from potential carers from culturally/linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- xi) Increased recruitment of culturally/linguistically specific carers may have implications for caseworkers, particularly if they are not used to working in a culturally diverse environment. This should be considered in relation to training and policies.
- xii) Any future evaluations of culturally/linguistically diverse foster care recruitment projects should ensure that the evaluation component is set up before the project commences, and that there is time to negotiate any issues regarding sharing of participant information. Obtaining basic participant demographic information at information sessions would help identify if projects are connecting with people who are possible carers. (eg: age, number of children, number of years in Australia)
- xiii) Tracking outcomes of fostering applications through this and similar projects would provide useful information about issues to address in more detail in the early stages. For example, level of basic English skill needed to negotiate the foster care system, engagement with foster care as alternative employment.
- xiv) Given current proposals to contract out provision of out of home care services to non-government agencies consideration should be given to expectations of out of home care providers in relation to recruitment of carers from culturally/linguistically diverse backgrounds. Expectations should promote a partnership model with community groups rather than recruitment campaigns focused on specific children.

## Appendix 1: Carerlink Business Rules 1.0 Recruitment Process Overview

### Timeframes and deliverables

Step	Process	Action	Conditions	Timeframe	Responsibility
1	Application	Enter paper applications	All paper applications are to be entered into Carerlink and an acknowledgement email sent	Within 1 day of receipt	Carerlink Support Team
		Allocation Application to Regions	Applications are to be allocated to a specific region based on their suburb details	Within 1 day of receipt	Carerlink Support Team
2	Phone screen	Conducting phone screens	All applicants are contacted for a phone screen	Within 10 days of receipt	Carerlink Support Team
		Sending Foster Care packages	Upon completion of phone screen candidates are sent a Foster Care package	Within 1 day of completion of CS History check	Carerlink Support Team
3	Probity checks	Conducting CS History check	A KiDS check is undertaken on all applicants	Within 3 days of completion of phone screen	Undertaken by CS
		Conducting WWCC check	A WWCC is undertaken on all applicants	Within 1 day of consent forms received	Carerlink Support Team
		Medical reference check	A medical check is sent to the applicant	Within 1 day of completion of CS History check	Carerlink Support Team
		Personal reference check	Two personal reference checks are to be undertaken on each applicant	Within 3 days of WWCC forms sent to Commission	Carerlink Support Team
		Previous Foster Care check	Where applicable a previous Foster Care check is to be undertaken	Within 1 day of consent forms received	Carerlink Support Team
		Ready for CS	The relevant CS region is notified that they have an applicant ready for assessment	Within 1 day of completion of probity checks	Carerlink Support Team
4	<b>Confirmation of probity checks</b>	<b>These steps will be undertaken by CS</b>			
5	<b>Home inspection</b>				
6	<b>Assessment</b>				
7	<b>Training</b>				
8	<b>Caseworker recommendation</b>				
9	<b>Manager Casework review</b>				
10	Authorisation	Code of conduct and authorisation letters issued	All applicants are issued advice regarding the outcome of their application	Within 1 day of advice received	Carerlink Support Team